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ABSTRACT

Paul Robeson was an athlete-scholar-concert artist-actor who was also an activist for civil and human rights. The son of a former slave, he was born and raised during segregation, lynching, and open racism. Robeson was one of the top performers of his time, earning more money than many white entertainers. His travels overseas opened his awareness to the universality of human suffering and oppression. His outspokenness and pro-Soviet stance made him a target of militant anti-communists. In 1950 the State Department revoked his passport, thereby denying him the right to travel and to earn money abroad. Robeson filed a lawsuit for reinstatement of his passport. In 1958 the Supreme Court agreed with Robeson, ruling that the State Department could not deny citizens the right to travel because of their political beliefs. This lesson relates to Article I, Section 9, of the U.S. Constitution, which states that the migration of people should not be prohibited by Congress, and to the First Amendment right of free speech, press, and assembly. The lesson correlates to the National History Standards and the National Standards for Civics and Government. It offers three primary source documents, a photograph, a painting, and a drawing of Paul Robeson. The lesson provides historical background (with nine resources); and suggests diverse teaching activities, including brainstorming, document analysis, comparing time periods, oral performances, constitutional connection, and creative interpretation. Appended are photograph analysis, written document analysis, sound recording analysis, and motion picture analysis worksheets and the documents. (BT)

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ED 462 355

National Archives and Records Administration

THE CONSTITUTION COMMUNITY

Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s)

The Many Faces of Paul Robeson

By Kerry C. Kelly

SO 033 606

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2000

The Constitution Community is a partnership between classroom teachers and education specialists from the National Archives and Records Administration. We are developing lessons and activities that address constitutional issues, correlate to national academic standards, and encourage the analysis of primary source documents. The lessons that have been developed are arranged according to historical era.

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The Many Faces of Paul Robeson

Constitutional Connection

This lesson relates to Article I, Section 9 , of the Constitution, which states the migration of people should not be prohibited by Congress, and to the First Amendment right of free speech, press, and assembly.

This lesson correlates to the National History Standards.

Era 9 -Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s)

- **Standard 1B** -Demonstrate understanding of how the social changes of the postwar period affected various Americans.

This lesson correlates to the National Standards for Civics and Government.

Standard II.D. 4. -Evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues in which fundamental values and principles may be in conflict.

Standard IV.C.1. -Evaluate, take, and defend positions about the effects of significant international political developments on the United States and other nations.

Standard V.B.4. -Evaluate, take, and defend positions on the relationships among personal, political, and economic rights.

Cross-curricular Connections

Share this exercise with your colleagues who teach United States history, African-American history, world cultures, music, and art.

List of Documents

1. Painting of Paul Robeson by Artist Betsy G. Reyneau.

2. Photograph of Paul Robeson leading Moore Shipyard [Oakland, CA] workers in singing the Star Spangled Banner, September 1942.

3. Editorial Drawing of Paul Robeson by artist, Charles H. Alston, 1943.

Historical Background

How many people do you know who are athletes? How about an athlete who has won 15 varsity letters in four different sports? An athlete who has also played professional football while at the same time being valedictorian at his university? Does this athlete also hold a law degree? How many scholar-athlete performers can you name? Concert artists who have sold out shows around the world and who can perform in more than 25 different languages? Does this scholar-athlete-performer also act in Shakespearean and Broadway plays and in movies? Can you identify a scholar-athlete-performer who is also an activist for civil and human rights? Someone who petitioned the president of the United States of America for an anti-lynching law, promoted African self-rule, helped victims of the Spanish civil war, fought for India's independence, and championed equality for all human beings? Did this scholar-athlete-performer-activist also have to endure terrorism, banned performances, racism, and discrimination throughout his career?

Paul Robeson was all these things and more. He was the son of a former slave, born and raised during a period of segregation, lynching, and open racism. He earned a four-year scholarship to Rutgers University, making him the third African American to attend the school. There he was a member of the prestigious Cap and Skull Honor Society, played four varsity sports (baseball, football, basketball, and track), won speech and debate tournaments, and managed to graduate valedictorian of his class. After graduation, Robeson applied his athletic abilities to a short career in professional football. Aside from his prowess on the gridiron, he earned a law degree and changed the direction of his career. His legal career was cut short, however, after a secretary refused to take dictation from him solely because of the color of his skin. He left law and turned to his childhood love of acting and singing. Robeson starred in Shakespeare's *Othello* , the musical *Showboat* , and films such as *Jericho* and *Proud Valley* . He was one of the top performers of his time, earning more money than many white entertainers. His concert career spanned the globe: Vienna, Prague, Budapest, Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, London, Moscow, New York, and Nairobi.

Robeson's travels opened his awareness to the universality of human suffering and oppression. He began to use his rich bass voice to speak out for independence, freedom, and equality for all people. He believed that artists should use their talents and exposure to aid causes around the world. "The artist must elect to fight for freedom or slavery. I have made my choice," he said. This philosophy drove Robeson to Spain during the civil war, to Africa to promote self-determination, to India to aid in the independence movement, to London to fight for labor rights, and to the Soviet Union to promote anti-fascism. It was in the Soviet Union where he felt that people were treated equally. He could eat in any restaurant and walk through the front doors of hotels, but in his own country he faced discrimination and racism everywhere he went.

While Robeson's activist role increased abroad, he met dissent and intimidation in the United States. Rioters at his concert at Peekskill, New York in 1949 smashed the stage, torched chairs, attacked concertgoers, and threatened Robeson's life. His outspokenness about human rights and his pro-Soviet stance made Robeson a prime target of militant anticommunists. In 1950 the State Department revoked his passport, thereby denying his right to travel and, ultimately, to earn income abroad. Robeson fought this injustice for years vigorously but with no success. He repeatedly applied for reinstatement of his passport but was turned down. He filed a lawsuit against the State Department and faced discouraging delays, adverse decisions, and rejected appeals. Yet Robeson stuck to his principles and refused to swear an affidavit that he was not a Communist. "Whether I am or not a Communist is irrelevant," he told the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1956. "The question is whether American citizens, regardless of their political beliefs or sympathies, may enjoy their constitutional rights." In 1958 the U.S. Supreme Court finally agreed, ruling that the State Department could not deny citizens the right to travel because of their political beliefs or affiliations.

To celebrate, Robeson gave his first New York concert in a decade at a sold-out Carnegie Hall. But the years of struggle had taken a personal and professional toll. Negative public response and the ban on his travel led to the demise of his career. Before the 1950s, Robeson was one of the world's most famous entertainers and beloved American heroes--once being named "Man of the Year" by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Despite all his accomplishments, Paul Robeson remains virtually ignored in American textbooks and history. The activities here are designed to introduce students to Paul Robeson and his many accomplishments and to address the issue of individual freedom versus national security.

Resources

Books

Foner, Philip S. *Paul Robeson Speaks-Writings, Speeches, Interviews 1918-1947* . New York: Brunner-Mazel Publishers, 1978.

Robeson, Paul. *Here I Stand* . Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.

Compact Discs

Paul Robeson: Songs of Free Men. Sony Classical, Masterworks Heritage.

Paul Robeson: Ballad for Americans. Welk Music Group, 1299 Ocean Avenue, Santa Monica, CA 90401.

Videos

"American Masters Special--Paul Robeson: Here I Stand." Thirteen --WNET Productions.

"The Proud Valley." 1940, Janus Films.

Web Sites

"Electronic New Jersey Site: Paul Robeson." (1996) http://scc01.rutgers.edu/njh 11 March 1999.

"Paul Robeson Virtual Exhibit at Rutgers University --New Brunswick." http://www.rutgers.edu/robeson/main.html 11 March 1999.

Individuals

Dr. William R. Fernekes, Supervisor of Social Studies at Hunterdon Central Regional High School, Flemington, NJ

Teaching Activities

Brainstorming

1. Ask students: "What characteristics are essential for a successful activist?" Compile a list of important characteristics on the board. Inquire if they can name anyone who demonstrates these characteristics? Record their responses on the board as well. Provide students with the following list of accomplishments and ask them to provide the name of one or two individuals who have realized each achievement. Instruct students that individuals who fit into more than one category can be listed wherever appropriate. The achievement categories are All-American football player, linguist who speaks more than five languages, author of books, Shakespearean actor, human rights activist, civil rights leader, concert artist known worldwide, scholar and researcher of global cultures and issues, internationally known recording star, and world-famous film actor. Provide students with time to brainstorm names and share ideas. Review the list with the class and ask if anyone fit into more than one category. Did they have anyone

who fit into every category? Inform them that there is one man who achieved every one of these accomplishments. Do they know or can they guess who it is? Has anyone heard of Paul Robeson? How can it be that an American citizen could accomplish so much, and yet remain so unknown? Is Robeson mentioned in your United States history textbook? If yes, what does it say? If no, why do you think he is not mentioned?

Document Analysis

2. Print out and photocopy Documents 1 and 2. Distribute the first document to half the class and the second to the other half. Tell them that they are each receiving an image of the same man, Paul Robeson. Instruct each student to complete a Photograph Analysis Worksheet for his or her document. After students have completed their analysis, lead a class discussion on the documents. You may want to write down one group's responses on one large piece of paper and the other group's responses on another piece of paper. Ask: Who is this man? What does he look like? How is he portrayed? What is he doing? Ask students to point out similarities and differences between the findings of the two groups. How can they account for the differences, if they are both images of the same man?

After the discussion, provide all students with a copy of Document 3 and a Written Document Analysis Worksheet. How does this document compare to Documents 1 and 2? Instruct students to complete the analysis worksheet. What can you learn about the same man from this document? Record student feedback on a third piece of paper. How can we explain the three different findings?

Inform students that this document was drawn by artist Charles H. Alston. During WWII, Alston worked for the Office of War Information and furnished editorial drawings to weekly black newspapers. His drawings for OWI included 35 portraits of African Americans who had made or were making valuable contributions to the nation--Robeson was the subject of one of them.

Comparing Time Periods

3. Divide students into groups of three and instruct them to put the three documents into historical context. Can they tell which event/document happened first, second, third? After students have put them into "order" instruct each group to defend its reasoning. Lead a class discussion on the clues found in the documents and the historical context generalizations that they have made. Explain to them that Paul Robeson's life span was from 1898 to 1976. Divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of three topics: Paul Robeson's life; United States history; and world history. Each group should research events from the period 1898-1976 for its assigned topic and construct a time line to reflect its findings. Provide a sample time line with specific spacing requirements so that all time lines will be the same length and an equal amount of space is available for each year. Require that students include the date, summary of event, and a

photograph or image for each important event on their time line. The group should work together to decide which events are important, but divide the research equally among its members in the interest of efficiency.

After the groups have completed their time lines, hang them up (or lay them out on the floor) so that the years align and students can see what was going on in each of the areas during a specific time. Lead a class discussion asking: How did Paul Robeson affect United States history? Vice versa? What world events impacted Paul Robeson's life? What world events impacted United States history? Discuss the interconnectedness of these three time lines.

Assign individual students to create a time line of their own life and compare it with world or national news. Can they see any effects or impacts? Why or why not? Do they see any parallels to Robeson's life?

Oral Performances

4. After examining Document 3 and providing the background information, ask the class what different roles did Paul Robeson play during his life? List and discuss each role the students come up with. Possible roles are family man, youth, scholar-athlete, performer, activist, politician, etc. Divide the class into at least four groups (or as many roles as you would like them to research). Each group will research an aspect of Paul Robeson's life and create a skit based on the obstacles, achievements, and controversy that surrounded him in that role. Require students to use a variety of sources, particularly the ones listed in the resources section of this lesson. Encourage students to bring in or create props and to dress appropriately for the scene.

Constitutional Connection

5. Ask students if they have ever been prohibited from doing something they've wanted to do. Ask if something has been taken away from them. Discuss the circumstances under which these things happened and their feelings about their experience. Ask: Did you do something bad? How did it make you feel? Were you punished? Was it a just punishment? What were the reasons for the prohibition or denial? After examining the documents and reading the Historical Background, ask students why they think the State Department denied Paul Robeson a passport. Instruct them to research postwar America to find the explanation for this decision. As a class, read and study the Constitution to locate the rights Robeson thought were being violated.

For homework, instruct students to find current (within the last year) articles from newspapers, magazines, the Internet, TV news reports, etc. that provide examples of where rights listed in the Constitution are being protected or challenged. Display these on a bulletin board along with a copy of the Constitution.

Creative Interpretation

6. Paul Robeson was the highest paid performer of his time. Not only could he sing in more than 25 different languages, but also his voice lent power to a variety of stage and screen characters during an era when minorities were not typically listened to. Assign students to view or listen to some of his work--you can choose from a variety of his films and recordings. Some are listed in the resources section. Direct them to complete the appropriate document analysis (either a Motion Picture Analysis or a Sound Recording Analysis Worksheet.) What does the work tell you about Paul Robeson? Identify the character or message of the song. Why do you think Robeson chose to be a part of this piece? Assign students to choose a song or film that they can identify with--that represents their beliefs and aspirations. Students should present their choices and explain why they chose what they did.

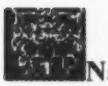
Commemoration Project

7. Since the centennial of Robeson's birth, there has been a movement to issue a postage stamp commemorating his influence. Brainstorm ways in which we commemorate people and their accomplishments. You may want to ask students to bring in artifacts or photographs of how we pay tribute to influential people. Examples include monuments, posters, postage stamps, memorabilia, T-shirts, shopping bags, and many others.

After examining and discussing the three documents and the various characters/roles Robeson played during his life, assign each student to design a memorial (in whatever medium they choose) that would accurately portray how they see Robeson's place in history. Students should decide for themselves what Paul Robeson's legacy for the 21st century is. Ask students to create a piece of art that would depict Robeson as they see fit and also to write an explanation as to why they chose the image that they did. Display the students' work in your library or media center.

The documents included in this project are from Record Group 200, Donated Collections; and Record group 208, Records of the Office of War Information. They are available online through the National Archives Information Locator (NAIL) [http://www.nara.gov/nara/nail.html] database, control numbers NWDNS-200-HNP-37, NWDNS-208-NS-3848-2, and NWDNS-208-COM-80. NAIL is a searchable database that contains information about a wide variety of NARA holdings across the country. You can use NAIL to search record descriptions by keywords or topics and retrieve digital copies of selected textual documents, photographs, maps, and sound recordings related to thousands of topics.

This article was written by Kerry C. Kelly, a teacher at Hunterdon Central Regional High School in Flemington, NJ.



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Photograph Analysis Worksheet

Step 1. Observation

A. Study the photograph for 2 minutes. Form an overall impression of the photograph and then examine individual items. Next, divide the photo into quadrants and study each section to see what new details become visible.

B. Use the chart below to list people, objects, and activities in the photograph.

PEOPLE	OBJECTS	ACTIVITIES

Step 2. Inference

Based on what you have observed above, list three things you might infer from this photograph.

_____

_____

_____

Step 3. Questions

A. What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?

_____

_____

B. Where could you find answers to them?

_____

_____

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Written Document Analysis Worksheet

1. TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):

___ Newspaper	___ Map	___ Advertisement
___ Letter	___ Telegram	___ Congressional record
___ Patent	___ Press release	___ Census report
___ Memorandum	___ Report	___ Other

2. UNIQUE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more):

___ Interesting letterhead	___ Notations
___ Handwritten	___ "RECEIVED" stamp
___ Typed	___ Other
___ Seals	

3. DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT: _____

4. AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT: _____

POSITION (TITLE): _____

5. FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN? _____

_____

6. DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)

A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. Why do you think this document was written?

_____

_____

C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.

_____

_____

D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:

_____

_____

E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:

_____

_____

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Sound Recording Analysis Worksheet

Step 1. Pre-listening

A. Whose voices will you hear on this recording?

B. What is the date of this recording?

C. Where was this recording made?

Step 2. Listening

A. Type of sound recording (check one):

____ Policy speech
____ Congressional testimony
____ News report
____ Interview
____ Entertainment broadcast
____ Press conference
____ Convention proceedings
____ Campaign speech
____ Arguments before a court
____ Panel discussion
____ Other

B. Unique physical qualitities of the recording

____ Music
____ Live broadcast
____ Narrated
____ Special sound effects
____ Background sound

C. What is the tone or mood of this recording?

_____
_____

Step 3. Post-listening (or repeated listening)

A. List three things in this sound recording that you think are important:

1.

2.

3.

B. Why do you think the original broadcast was made and for what audience?

_____

_____

C. What evidence in the recording helps you to know why it was made?

_____

_____

D. List two things this sound recording tells you about life in the United States at the time it was made:

1.

2.

E. Write a question to the broadcaster that is left unanswered by this sound recording.

_____

_____

F. What information do you gain about this event that would not be conveyed by a written transcript? Be specific.

_____

_____

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Motion Picture Analysis Worksheet

Step 1: Pre-viewing

A. Title of film: _____

Record Group source: _____

B. What do you think you will see in this motion picture? List Three concepts or ideas that you might expect to see based on the title of the film. List some people you might expect to see based on the title of the film.

Concepts/Ideas	People
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Step 2: Viewing

A. Type of motion picture (check where applicable)

____ Animated cartoon
____ Documentary film
____ Newsreel
____ Propaganda film
____ Theatrical short subject
____ Training film
____ Combat film
____ Other

B. Physical qualities of the motion picture (check where applicable)

____ Music
____ Narration
____ Special effects
____ Color
____ Live action
____ Background noise
____ Animation
____ Dramatizations

C. Note how camera angles, lighting, music, narration, and/or editing contribute to creating an atmosphere in this film. What is the mood or tone of the film?

Step 3: Post-viewing (or repeated viewing)

A. Circle the things that you listed in the previewing activity that were validated by your viewing of the motion picture.

_____

_____

B. What is the central message(s) of this motion picture?

_____

_____

C. Consider the effectiveness of the film in communicating its message. As a tool of communication, what are its strengths and weaknesses?

_____

_____

D. How do you think the filmmakers wanted the audience to respond?

_____

_____

E. Does this film appeal to the viewer's reason or emotion? How does it make you feel?

_____

_____

F. List two things this motion picture tells you about life in the United States at the time it was made:

1.

2.

G. Write a question to the filmmaker that is left unanswered by the motion picture.

_____

_____

H. What information do you gain about this event that would not be conveyed by a written source? Be specific.

_____

_____

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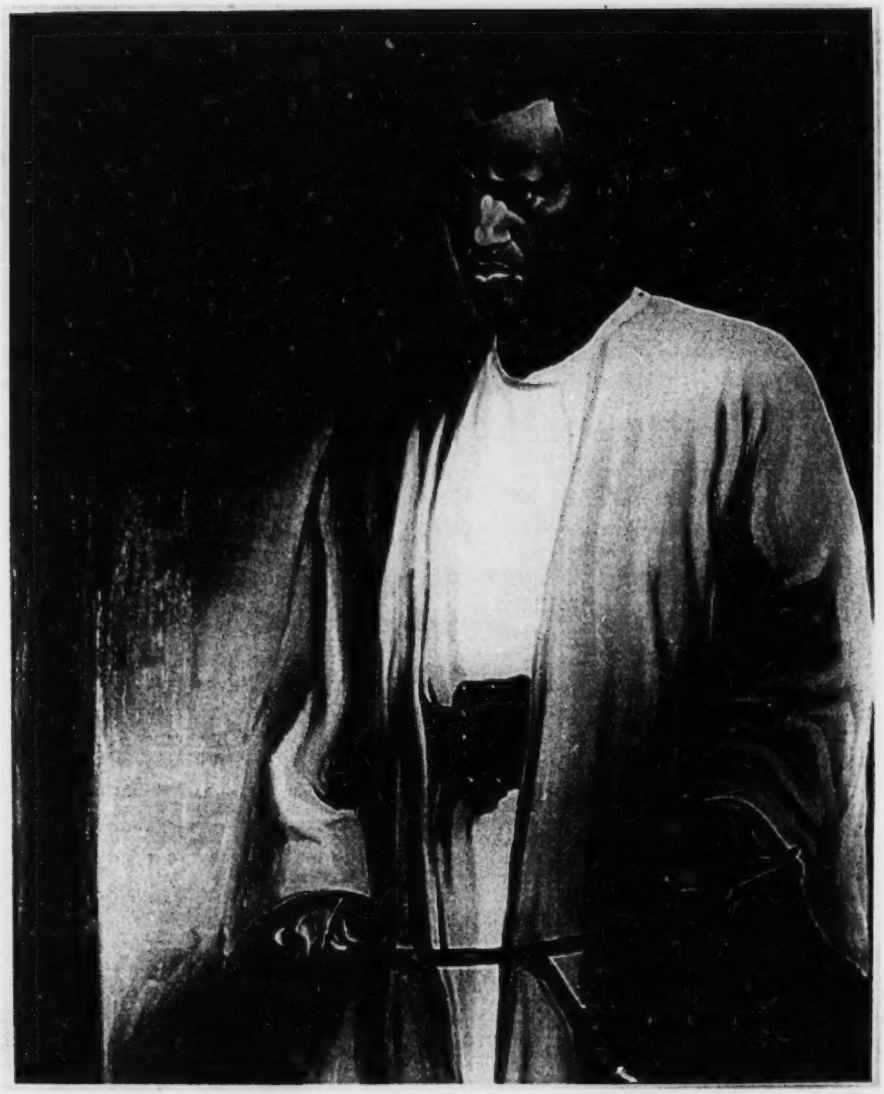

Document 1: Painting of Paul Robeson by Artist Betsy G. Reyneau.

Document 2: Photograph of Paul Robeson leading Moore Shipyard [Oakland, CA] workers in singing the Star Spangled Banner, September 1942.

LONG BEFORE THE WORLD KNEW HIM AS AN ARTIST, YOUNG ROBESON HAD ACHIEVED FAME AS AN ATHLETE. ONE OF THE GREATEST FOOTBALL PLAYERS OF ALL TIME, HE WAS SELECTED ALL AMERICAN END BY THE LATE WALTER CAMP.
NO "DUMB ATHLETE," PAUL WAS AN HONOR STUDENT, AND PHI BETA KAPPA MAN AT RUTGERS!
PAUL ROBESON
ACTOR, ARTIST, ATHLETE.
INTERNATIONALLY FAMOUS AS A CONCERT ARTIST, PAUL LOVES TO SING THE SONGS OF THE PEOPLE. ALWAYS IN DEMAND FOR THE STAGE, SCREEN AND RADIO, HE NOW DEVOTES HIS TALENTS TO THE WAR EFFORT, BY SINGING AT BOND RALLIES, AND FOR THE BOYS IN THE ARMED FORCES.
PROBABLY BEST KNOWN FOR HIS BRILLIANT PORTRAYAL OF THE MAD RULER IN O'NEILL'S "EMPEROR JONES," ROBESON HAS LONG BEEN A GREAT FAVORITE ON THE STAGE AND SCREEN.
Alston

Document 3: Editorial Drawing of Paul Robeson by artist, Charles H. Alston, 1943.

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